Informant: LMP-S4 Language: Spanish/English
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Interviewer: Claudia
Transcriber: Reyna Ronelli

CH: How can we get in contact with Ms. Nina Perez? Could you introduce her to us?

S4: Sure. We can go any day, and I can explain to her… because I have to go in person.

CH: Yes, that would be good.

S4: I can find out what she is interested in talking about, and what she does not want to get into.

CH: Ok, so you can contact me.

S4: Yes, I have to call her and find out.

CH: Perfect. That is best, that way we are not intruding on her.

S4: You couldn't get in because she has to let you in. She lives in a senior citizen condominium, so she has to let you in.

CH speaking to MOJ: So should we go on and maybe ask some things about the consultation and stuff, San Simon, El Niño de Atocha?

MOJ: [???]

CH: I could, but I think I rather save that because I didn't bring my questionnaire.

MOJ: Oh.

CH: My questions.

MOJ: Ok.

CH: We had worked some on – well…

S4: Why don't we do it in English better?

CH: Yes, I'm going to do it in English because we have only a few translators. Ok, so I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions about San Simon, like for example, about your altar for San Simon, and if you work with him. Do you work with him?

S4: I work with San Simon a lot, but mainly for my personal use here in the store. I ask him for better business and for customers-money to come in through the door, and that's

why he's placed in the front of the store and not in the rear here. Most of the things that we have in the rear of the store are for people and whatever we have in the front of the store is for them to work at the front of the store, to have people come in.

CH: Oh, I see. Is there a difference in the placement of the altar, like if the altar is placed on a high table or on the floor?

S4: Yes, they all have their preferences. Usually spirits, many spirits prefer a table. A regular sized table to just being united in that one area, whereas San Simon prefers the floor, and he prefers a corner of a wall.

CH: So he's placed in that area. That's very much his liking?

S4: Yes.

CH: How did you come to find out about San Simon?

S4: Through my Communion God mother. She's a native of Guatemala and through her, I was told a lot of stories about him and his miracles, his workings, and how to invoke him, and which situations to utilize him for, and how to utilize him, what offering work best for him, what different color candles you offer him, and all types of things. So, I would use it myself and he would always work with me very well.

CH: What are some of the things that you have asked, that you have worked with him? I know you mentioned for work, that you use him personally. Are there other personal works that you've done with him?

S4: Personally, just economic issues. The store might not have a very good week and I ask him for, I petition him for a better business week. With other people, you can work with him at any level for positive and negative and legal matters, and love issues, health, and protection spells, basically everything.

CH: Do people ever come here just to see San Simon?

S4: A few people.

CH: Are they mostly from Central American areas, or?

S4: Most of them are, but not all of them.

CH: How long have you been working with San Simon?

S4: A good fifteen years.

CH: That's a long time.

MOJ: Do you know why he is associated with alcohol?

S4: Because he is a drinker himself. One of his offerings is hard liquor, and in his temple, at his shrine they also – people with problems with alcohol will petition him to help them with that issue of alcoholism and they believe that his energy or his spirit will follow the person and help the person through that time and will be cured of alcoholism. He was a drinker himself, and that is one of his main offerings, liquor.

CH: So, he also cures people from alcoholism?

S4: In Central America, it's believed that if you ask him for something, you will repay him with alcohol – with bottles and bottles of liquor. But, after having him come through with you first. It's like you petition him to be helped with alcoholism, and in return you will repay him with seven, fourteen, or twenty-one bottles of liquor. These are taken to his temple, or so many bundles of flowers, or so many bundles of tobacco. It is an exchange but he would have to first come through before you make these offerings.

CH: Do you know if a lot of people seek his help?

S4: Well, when I was in Guatemala, I did see a lot of people. There is this room where he has a shrine that has people's testimonies, people's photographs, and people's stories of how they were helped by him, and usually what they do is that they hang little liquor bottles on a string on the wall, and the name of the person that was cured of alcoholism goes in the liquor bottle.

CH: Really?

S4: So, you do see a lot of that.

CH: What about here?

S4: Here, the thing is that we don't have a real temple where we can go and worship him freely, so mainly you hear of a lot of individuals doing it on their own-in their own houses or of people that have his statue.

CH: Do you know of any remedies associated with San Simon for alcoholism?

S4: If it is a spiritual remedy, what they usually do, is they walk through streets where they know that people drink on the street, and they pick up-if he's a beer drinker, they'll pick up a beer can, an empty beer can found on the street, and they'll put the person's photograph inside the beer can, and then they'll add other ingredients, like mainly holy water and different types of oils, and just powders, and organic ingredients, and then they'll put it in front of his image, in front of the statue of San Simon, and along side they will just light purple candles for domination so that the person will have the ability to dominate and overcome this problem of alcoholism. That is when they do it without the

person knowing it. If the person drinks hard liquor, they will find a small liquor bottle thrown on the street, and do the same spell.

CH: It has to be a found bottle?

S4: It has to be a found bottle because the belief is that if you find it out on the street, it is from a person that is a very bad alcoholic-a person that is maybe homeless and just drinks and throws things on the floor. The belief is that the object has a certain energy that you can - the idea is for you to transfer that alcoholism to the other person that threw that bottle or can on the street and get rid of it.

CH: Are there ever cases of people coming in whom have had alcoholism through one of these interactions, transferred onto them?

S4: Well, I've seen the opposite, where people have spells put on them, where they are alcoholics, and they never had such a problem before, and after being spiritually healed, they are cleaned, they return to normal, they are no longer alcoholics.

CH: What are some of the ways that you diagnose whether a person has an alcoholic problem or not?

S4: You see it in the reading, and even before you see it in the reading, the person that brings them in will tell you that the person never drank before and started drinking a month or two ago, just chronically everyday, for no reason.

CH: That would be one of the indications of spiritual –

S4: Spiritual involvement of inducing alcoholism on a person, that before never had anything that – the person was never even a social drinker before, much less a chronic alcoholic of just a few months ago.

CH: Since you are an Espiritista, Santero, and Palero, what are some of the divination methods that you use to read and see what the person…

S4: Spiritually, you look at the person and you feel vibes from the person, or you hear voices of spirits telling you what is wrong with the person, or through a card reading, a seashell reading, or through just asking the cauldron, and that confirms your suspicions. You can use any of the methods to diagnose a spell.

CH: How do you know what method to use?

S4: If you can't see it on the person just by looking at them, then you would just – it depends what method is quickest, and either one will work.

CH: Ok, do you see men afflicted with alcoholic problems more than women?

S4: Nine out of ten times it is always more men than women.

CH: What would you say is the ethnicity of most of these men?

S4: It is always Hispanic.

CH: Hispanic. Would you say Mexican, Central American, Caribbean, or South American?

S4: It is usually a cut between sixty percent Mexican and the rest is divided between Central Americans, South Americans, and a much less percentage of people from the Caribbean.

CH: What do you think attributes, what do you think gives way to alcoholism? Is it more spiritual problems or is it other types of problems?

S4: Usually it is more logical issues, and usually when they come to you with problems of alcoholism, they never tell you that they suspect witchcraft, it is usually something where they'll say, well he's always been drinking or he's always drank or his dad used to drink, or his brothers always drank, and know he drinks. Usually they attribute it to normal things. They just try to use this avenue of beliefs to see if there are any resolutions to their problems in the spiritual world.

CH: Are there… So most of the people get brought in by a family member?

S4: Often times, the person will come in alone and tell you about that cousin or that son, or that spouse, or that relative.

CH: What do you do when somebody comes in and tells you about that person? Do you prescribe for them to bring that person in?

S4: I prescribe remedies and tell them to administer them to the patient, and if there is anything you can do spiritually, then you can do it spiritually also. You would work spiritually and through herbal medicine.

CH: Can you describe a particular case, in which you had to do something spiritual in order for the person to be healed from alcoholism?

S4: There was a case in March, of a woman's son that had a problem with alcoholism and his wasn't spiritual. It was just normal alcoholism. High school dropout, didn't work, just had all these friends that were always drinking, and he was always drinking with them. We did both methods, and in the end you don't know which worked, whether it was both methods or one method because we always use both methods.

MOJ: What are some of the herbal remedies, treatments?

S4: Usually, we stick to two sedatives, and herbal sedatives, which are Valerian root, Chamomile, Linden tea, and just these different sedatives, and at the same time we use these seeds from this tree called "**Abas de San Ignacio**." That is basically the main ingredient that causes these people to have mainly nausea and gastric intestinal problems when they do ingest alcohol, and usually that is what makes them stop drinking because they react, not violently, but just negatively with their first drink. They get gastric intestinal issues like anything from diarrhea, to vomiting, to just stomach pains, so it is just like a bad reaction. It is not a deadly reaction because it is just that they don't get poisoned. They just can't continue drinking. As soon as they stop drinking, then the symptoms start going away. The sedatives, what they do, they just create the same effect as alcohol. It's just that the person's system isn't like overly hyper. It brings you down, and sedates you just like alcohol would. So, they pretty much get the same feeling in their body of being sedated with alcohol but without the alcohol, rather with plants.

CH: Have you ever heard of, I think it's called, "**Hierba del Toro**," or **Cascara de**… no, not **Cascara del Toro**. I think its "**hierba de**…no. It's like a root, a "**cascara**," that is from a tree. Oh! "**Cascara del Diablo**," I think that's what it is called. It is used for alcoholism.

S4: No.

CH: I'll check on the name. I'll just check back with you on that.

MOJ: The one that you used, is that a seed or a leaf, or?

S4: It's a seed, and it is the most common.

MOJ: That's the one mentioned by [???].

S4: You think so, seeds?

MOJ: Yes.

S4: It's a disk. It's a round disk. It's dark in color, dark brown.

MOJ: Do you crush it up into a powder?

S4: We toast it. It is like if you were roasting peanuts. You would do the same method of roasting the seed. The outside is the shell, and the inside is what you would actually crush up, and it does smell and taste like nuts, like walnuts. This is what you usually administer to the person in their food, without them knowing that you are giving it to them. Some people do willingly take it on their own, and most people do see results. Not everybody, but most people do.

CH: How many?

S4: There's a ratio of between sixty and seventy percent of the people that do see eradication, of just completely not being able to ingest liquor.

CH: What would you say is the percentage of the people who take it voluntarily, and those who –

S4: It is only like twenty percent of people that will voluntarily take it. Most of the times they will not, since they have issues of recognizing their problem, and they have issues of going anywhere and doing any kind of treatment for themselves, whether it is spiritual or group counseling, whether it is anything. They just will not participate in any of these methods.

CH: How long does it take for a person to really take the remedy and not be able to drink?

S4: Usually, it should be within the same day they ingest it.

CH: Wow. How much is given? How much of the seeds?

S4: It is never measured accurately, but usually, I'm guessing it's half a teaspoonful a day of the powder.

CH: Put in their food?

S4: Put in their food, yes.

MOJ: How long?

S4: It's an everyday thing. It's an everyday process. Until you see that the person actually completely stops. You know it is working because when they do drink again, there's always a gastric intestinal disorder. There is always something that goes wrong. It is like they do not continue, and they have to stop.

CH: So that makes them stop. Do you ever combine Chamomile, Valerian root, and seeds of "**Aguas de San Ignacio**?"

S4: No.

CH: It's always one or the other?

S4: Separate, or at different times. Because one will give you the sedative effect, and the other will give you the anti-alcoholic feeling in the body, and it will start rejecting the alcohol. It is like a bad reaction in the gastric intestinal system with both the alcohol and this plant going in all at once.

CH: Ok. What would be some of the spiritual recommendations that a person can do to rid him/herself of alcoholism?

S4: Usually they'll petition San Simon for that. He's the most common and popular for spiritual work on alcoholism.

MOJ: Do you give any information to the patients? Do you talk to them about alcoholism?

S4: You always try to refer to them to just conventional methods, "AAA" meetings, meetings that we know are around here, that are close by, and we'll try to give them hot line numbers and try to give them help so that they can…

MOJ: Are there Spanish speaking AAA meetings around?

S4: They are all over the place here. There are actually no English speaking AAA meetings around here because there would be very little public for that.

CH: Do you ever have people come in for, let's say, physical ailments or different types of problems having to do with family or a personal problem that they are having, and it turns out to be an alcoholism problem? Does anything like that ever occur?

S4: Well, usually they know. They know what is going on, or they know why things are happening because they will see it. They live it, so they know who is drinking and they know that that is part of the problem, and why they are not in a good relationship-if it's the person's spouse that is coming in, or vice-versa, so usually they'll know what their problems are.

CH: So, if the person comes in, they'll usually say, "I'm an alcoholic," they will not say, "I'm having these problems-sex problem?"

S4: They usually will say that they drink a lot. The person will not usually say that he/she is an alcoholic. The person will usually say that he/she drinks a lot.

CH: Do you ever, like within the Latino community, and the community that you are associated with, do you notice if they are people that have alcoholism problems.

S4: Quite a few.

CH: Quite a few?

S4: Quite a few because they have been in here while they are intoxicated.

CH: Do they recognize that problem?

S4: No, not most of the times. They usually will say that that is something that they do once in a while and not too often.

CH: What about the community surrounding them? Do others say, oh, he's an alcoholic?

S4: Usually they are shunned. Especially if they are way at the bottom, and they are not working, and do not have a clean physical aspect. Usually, if their alcoholic problem is really bad, they are shunned even more.

CH: Why are they shunned?

S4: Usually they just believe that the person is not doing very much for him/herself, and is letting him/herself go too much. For instance, people that are alcoholics, just on the weekends- three or four days out of the week, they are seen as, well they are accepted more because they continue with their work, they continue paying their bills, they drive, they have a clean physical aspect.

CH: I see. But, do people perceive them as being alcoholics or do they just say, oh he drinks a lot?

S4: Usually they will say, that the person drinks a lot. You have to hit rock bottom for a Hispanic person to say that he is an alcoholic. By that time, they have to see you without the job. They have to see you not kept very well physically. Your appearance has to be very bad for them to say that you are an alcoholic. If you can keep all your bills paid, if you can keep the integrity of your family, they do not consider that alcoholism.

CH: I see. Do you think that most of the people that suffer from problems of alcoholism are immigrant Latinos, or are they American born?

S4: There is more immigrant Hispanics than Mexican-American people.

CH: What would you say is an understandable or a normal amount of drinking?

S4: Most people's perspective?

CH: In the Latino community.

S4: They believe that if you drink once a week, it isn't being an alcoholic.

CH: How much would be too much for an individual?

S4: Usually they look at the person's problems, like if the person doesn't have a job, lost his/her job, lost the family, is practically homeless, and that is when they believe that the person is an alcoholic, whereas if they drink, they can practically drink everyday, and if

they can keep their normal livelihood going, then nobody sees the person as an alcoholic. Most people don't.

CH: But one drink per day, that's ok?

S4: Usually if they drink beer, usually it's a six pack a day, and they do not consider that an alcoholism because they keep their job, their car payments going, and they keep everything in tact, so by the time they see you not working and not really having any place to stay, and your physical appearance goes down, then that is when they start thinking that you are an alcoholic. It is tolerated a whole lot.

CH: Yes, I guess so.

S4: It is promoted a whole lot.

CH: Promoted?

S4: You see minors drinking. It is very common to see, at any Hispanic celebration, and have parents give their minor sons not daughters, but minor sons, male sons, liquor. It is very normal.

CH: What would the age range of those minors be?

S4: Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen.

CH: That is pretty young.

S4: It's acceptable within males. As for females, you do not see that.

CH: What about among the grown male men, what would you say the age range between those men is?

S4: It's usually middle-aged people that drink.

CH: Like what, thirty, forties?

S4: Yes.

CH: Ok. Do you, lets see, it's kind of hard without my list.

MOJ: What are some of the kinds of events where they give teenage boys alcohol?

S4: At anything from sweet sixteen, sweet fifteen celebrations to birthday parties, to just religious, baptismal celebrations, first communion, and just anything. In our Hispanic culture, for anything religious there's always a big party behind it or a big bash, where if it was religious and it took place within the holy shrine, once you've gotten home or the

place you've rented for the party, it is no longer a religious event. It's now a social thing, where you drink, where you eat, where you dance, where you meet people. It's just a whole different thing, and that even can be in your house. Again, the only religious part of the celebration is within the shrine. Once you've left the shrine, it's no longer a religious celebration. Now, it's opening gifts, it's dancing, it's videotaping, it's just doing everything else.

MOJ: Males, young males, not women.

S4: No, it's perceived as bad if a woman is drinking too much. She can drink with her husband and be lively, and just be part of the scene but not getting drunk because then it is bad. Whereas, men can get as drunk as they want. It's perceived as macho. It's perceived as normal, funny, as everything. Everything but what it actually is.

CH: Do you ever get cases of women who have a drinking problem?

S4: Quite a few.

CH: What would you say…

S4: But they are usually not your typical alcoholics. Usually, most of them drink for money.

CH: Drink for money?

S4: Drink for money. A lot of them are like that. They drink for money. They work in bars and they have to drink as much beer as they can to be paid for every beer that they drink.

CH: Really?

S4: They get paid five to ten dollars for every beer that they drink, so they have to drink ten, twenty, thirty beers in one day.

CH: Are they kind of like bartenders?

S4: They are quote on quote "waitresses," but they are not actually doing any of that, they are more like hostesses.

CH: Where you have to kind of just hang out with the client?

S4: And just drink as much as you can, while he is paying for twelve dollar beers, and you are getting the five to ten dollar tip from that beer.

CH: I see.

S4: Some of them end up having an alcoholic problem after a few months, or a few years of working there.

CH: What are some of the problems, the physical problems that people have from alcoholism?

S4: Usually, they ask us to help them treat their liver problems, because they'll start having problems with their liver. They'll start having problems with their kidneys. They'll start having problems with swelling of their stomach, and not being able to digest food properly. They come in to get remedies to work on these issues: the liver, the kidneys, and stomach problems.

CH: For that you prescribe some of these sedatives?

S4: No, like I said, if they have liver problems then you prescribe "**Boldo**," or just other herbs that might detoxify the liver, diuretics for their kidneys: "**Cola de Caballo**," "**Jamaica**," any herbs that I know are going to be a diuretic. For stomach issues, if there is pain you take mint tealeaves and you give this to the person, or you give them "**Estafiate**," if there is slow digestion.

CH: Has anybody ever gotten sick from any of these treatments? Is there an amount that is too much, that might make the person sick?

S4: I imagine that there should be. But most people actually do not overdo what they are doing. Whereas, I've heard people overdo it, especially when they are trying to cure insomnia, and one tablespoon of the herb doesn't work so they add two, three, or five, and sometimes that doesn't work either, so often times they will exceed the dosage and nothing will happen. It is like if they drank water, and not something that was tainted with an herbal or organic substance. They can exceed the dose, sometimes ten times and not have any results from that.

CH: What would you say the age range of the women who drink, or who have those drinking problems, is?

S4: Between twenty and forty.

CH: Are there ever any cases of younger women drinking?

S4: There might be but they really haven't come here.

CH: These women that have a drinking problem, are they brought in by friends to treat the problem, or do they come in on their own?

S4: Very few will come in on their own. Usually, it is somebody else that brings them along with them.

CH: How receptive are they, when a friend brings them in?

S4: Usually they will just try it because it isn't a very expensive remedy, so they usually go ahead and try it and see what will happen. They just give it a try.

CH: Do you think that these remedies are successful for a lot of people?

S4: To relieve their symptoms, they are good. Again, if they are having problems with urinary tract infections from dehydrating their bodies from all the alcohol, diuretics will work. If they have a swollen liver, again these herbs will detoxify their liver and the swelling will come down. The pains, and colic, and all these other digestive problems do get results with these plants, these herbs.

CH: Where are some of these herbs found, like "**Abas de San Ignacio**?"

S4: "**Abas de San Ignacio**," I've always known that they have always been imported from Mexico, and I don't believe that they are grown here, locally.

CH: What about Valerian root?

S4: I know that it is global. You can find it in Asian, or Latin countries, Europe, and just everywhere.

CH: Do you sell some of these herbs at the botanica?

S4: Yes, all of those herbs.

CH: Do a lot of people come in and request them?

S4: Most people already know. Somebody tries something that works, and will tell somebody else, and through word of mouth they will know what actually works.

CH: So, sometimes they come in and just ask for it?

S4: Most of the time they will come and already have a list of herbs, or know the names of what they are buying, and most people do not know what that plant looks like because they were told by someone else to buy it and use it.

CH: What are some of the instances where the spirits influence a person? Does it always have to do with an evil spirit placed on somebody or are there other cases? Like when the spirit influences the drinking.

S4: A spiritual belief is that you inherit your forefather's curses, or you are paying the price of your forefather's sins, or whatever problems they caused other people. Another belief is that your own bad karma will bring these other issues, or it is a hexing, or it is a

demon that's somehow coercing you into a vice of some sort. There are a lot of spiritual beliefs behind every problem, especially alcoholism.

CH: Ok.

MOJ: Why do people bring their friend or family member to you, a botánica for health reasons?

S4: Because in most of our cultures there usually is one doctor in small villages but they have more of a preference towards the herbal healer because of economics and because of their forefathers who maybe didn't have much of an acquaintance with western medicine so they would always be skeptical with western medicine and most of their remedies were already folk medicine so you always knew that this is what you can use, and this is what you can buy. There is this traditional thing behind it, and sometimes they would try western methods and maybe not go through with them, but they tried them and didn't see anything happen after the first day or two of using them and so they opted for further options as in Aids and Cancer patients, where they are just in a desperate situation of trying to find other means aside from conventional medicine that they believe isn't really helping them.

MOJ: If some of them, who come to you, eventually go through AA, do any of them go to AA first?

S4: Many of them, before and after.

MOJ: But why come to you then if they've gone to AA already?

S4: Because they haven't been, I guess, not as constant with their visits or with their appointments, or with their sessions, and I guess with alcoholism it must work whereas most people don't react to it as quickly as others. So, usually people are in a hurry to just have some quick fix, and if the AA meetings haven't done that for them, or very little and not much, then they'll seek other means.

MOJ: Do they suspect that there are other herbal means that will…

S4: Because they've heard of it. Usually, it is a cultural thing where they have heard of someone trying it or doing it, or it's part of the tradition, of the culture of Hispanic heritage to solve everything with herbal remedies and cures.

CH: I was just wondering if they work with spirits or saints that assist especially or specifically in alcohol problems?

S4: They'll ask "San Cypriano" many times. They'll ask the Holy Spirit. They'll ask St. Claire, Saint Martha, just anybody who has to do with domination or with enlightenment like the Holy Spirit or Saint Claire, meaning that you can be enlightened and see your life going the wrong way.

CH: So, because they are seen as dominating spirits, you seek their help so that they can help you dominate that problem.

S4: Dominate that vice in the person, or enlighten that person's mind so that the person can see what is going on and actually doing something about it.

CH: Usually the color of the candle that is used for that is purple?

S4: Usually it is purple, and if you are going to enlighten someone it is usually white.

CH: White?

S4: White for enlightenment.

CH: And purple for domination?

S4: Domination.

CH: Ok, do you have any other questions?

MOJ: One other one, and that is, whether some of these people become religious in order to, or as a part of overcoming alcoholism?

S4: I see that a whole lot but usually with Evangelicals, it's usually with Evangelicals. That's where you see that, with Evangelicals because they give them a place to stay. They constantly discuss the Bible and the word of the Lord, and just everything gets to where their environment traps them into that. It's always for their own good because they do stop. So, it's always, whether or not they are coercing you into switching religions that's one thing, but they do resolve the issue of alcoholism and drug abuse and being a person that isn't very productive for society or that is actually against society-in and out of jails and all that. So, actually their programs are very good. But most people do argue that why do you have to be coercing someone into another faith, and take them from their roots into this other new found religion, but at the same time their methods are quite effective.

MOJ: Is there anyone in Santeria or Palo, any spirit or saint that can help at all with alcoholism?

S4: We believe that they all can.

MOJ: All of them?

S4: In Santeria, they usually go with Obatala, which is the enlightened deity. With Palo, they usually use any spirit because they all drink, so they can all help with that issue, but in Santeria it is usually Obatala.

MOJ: If someone is here for help, and seems to you not to be particularly religious, do you recommend that they get spiritual help, and in what particular religion? Any religion?

S4: You work with the person and you try to figure out what their beliefs are, and with some people you do not even go as far as to ask them to believe in anything spiritual. You go with their belief of the elements and that is when you start going into the beliefs of earth, wind, and fire, and everything else. I had one time a Satanist come in here, and he was very young, and he had all these other issue that were just so destructive in him, and when we got him into all this other stuff which was something similar, because he didn't want spiritualism because of the fact that we used the word of God so much, so then I got him into Palo, and he got into it and started to see what he was actually thinking of doing while he was in Satanism. That is when he completely changed his whole view, and he even acknowledges all the bad thoughts he had in his mind, and how his mind was poisoned while being in Satanism. He had developed those beliefs in his home country, El Salvador, whereas here, where you replace it with Palo, he thought of it as being something very evil and very graphic, and very just awful. Once he was into it, he just kind of was switched over but he is no longer a destructive person that has thoughts of mass suicide, which he did. I mean, he thought about offering his own mother to the devil, and he would actually plan out how he would do that.

CH: How old is he?

S4: He's 23. Where he would go, they would tell him that was something he had to do to show the devil that he needed to do something that was very big, and I coerced him into Palo which was completely different from his belief of Satanism, and just destroying everything and everybody, including himself. He stopped drinking actually, after going into Palo.

CH: How old was he at that time?

S4: He was Twenty-two.

CH: Twenty-two, so it was within a year's time?

S4: He stopped the alcohol and all the ideas of killing and destroying people.

CH: Sound like those kids in Columbine.

S4: Right. You are replacing something with something that looks just like it because they see this culture and they see the smell of rot and cadaver, and so for that it is even more graphic and more there. Whereas, if they believe in the devil, they just have an image to worship but they have really nothing to look at. They see the slaughtering of animals and to them that is crazy for them, that's cool, that's everything. They do not understand that there is a purpose behind it, that it isn't just for fun, for vandalizing, but they get so much into it, where they forget about everything else. In his own country, he

would vandalize cemeteries. He would just do all these things that weren't supposed to be done, whereas here all this negative energy is just going through all these other beliefs, and he just changed his whole attitude, and nobody was telling him to stop this and stop that. It was all on his own, where he just changed one view for another. With this view, he is not thinking of hurting anyone.

CH: When spiritual remedies are called for, do you perform them or do you instruct the person on how to perform them?

S4: Usually we perform them for the person.

CH: Do you perform them with the person present?

S4: At times, or if the hours are different, then we do them at home if there is a certain hour that they have to be done, but they always participate with a candle lighting ceremony or prayer that they have to pray at home, but there is always participation on both sides.

CH: Are there specific prayers that are best for aiding the situation of alcoholism?

S4: If they were praying to a certain saint then they would use that certain saint's prayer with the petition following the prayer.

CH: What would the petition be like?

S4: Just have the person stop drinking and have negative ideas, or thoughts of drinking go away from the person, and help them empower their mind to overcome the situation that is disempowering you.

CH: So, you basically pray and ask for that?

S4: With a candle ceremony and stuff.

CH: Do you have to do anything to the candle?

S4: You usually dress it. You prepare it with different oils, and different dried herbs, or stick powders.

CH: What kind of oils, or herbs?

S4: With oils, it depends on what saint you are working with. Let's say that you are lighting a candle for Obatala, then you would use cottonseed oil, almond oil, olive oil, eggshell powder, and cocoa butter bits. If it's sticks, you use "**Palo Vencedor**," "**Palo Amansahuapo," "Palo yo puedo mas que tu."**

CH: What about if it is San Simon? Do you dress his candle?

S4: You dress his candles with yellow mustard seeds, black mustard seeds.

CH: What types of oils do you use? Do you use mustard seeds?

S4: No, you use other oils, like lets say, a mixture of benzoine oil, frankincense oil, and myrrh oil.

CH: Are there other offering that are given to Obatala or San Simon, in the case of alcoholism?

S4: If it is Obatala, and it calls for a big ceremony, there is an offering of a pair of doves, and two white hens.

CH: A pair of doves and the two white hens?

S4: Two white hens.

CH: What about for San Simon?

S4: For San Simon it is usually food, liquor, tobacco, and flowers.

CH: Do you know of a particular origin story for San Simon, on how he came to be San Simon?

S4: He was a wealthy person, a drinker, a womanizer, but he always had this passion for the poor, for the indigenous people, and being himself a wealthy European and of Indian blood, he had this compassion for poor indigenous people and he would always help them.

CH: Sounds a lit bit like Jesus Malverde.

S4: Somewhat, only that he had his own money to work with. He didn't have to actually steal from anyone like Malverde did.

CH: Right.

MOJ: Was there any sense of dating, when he lived?

S4: We know San Simon was around in the 1800's and I know he didn't come into the 1900's at all. He stood within that 1800's and before 1900 period, and Malverde died in Nineteen-thirty-something, but he was born in eighteen-something also.

CH: Do you know how he died?

S4: San Simon, no. I believe that there was no special story behind his death. I think it was just a normal death. I really haven't heard any stories of his death being anything different or strange, or unusual.

CH: So, he basically went on to become special to the people due to him helping people.

S4: And the fact that he would always spiritually communicate with people, and appear to them, and work with them.

CH: Has he ever appeared to you?

S4: In dreams, a whole lot, and in images in glasses of water.

CH: I know that some people channel him. Have you ever channeled him?

S4: Only once.

CH: Do you remember what that was like?

S4: What I was told was that he spoke to one woman in particular, and she had all these thoughts that were completely the opposite of what the actual truth was, and he just came in and talked to her about how to straighten out those ideas and thoughts that she had in her mind, which were not correct.

CH: Did you channel him intentionally or did he just come to you?

S4: No, no that was not the intention, no.

CH: Are there ways that he can be called upon, to channel him, if one should seek to do that?

S4: People that are very close to him, actually in their mind think of him, and they call upon him, and they repeat his name and call him to themselves.

CH: Is there a number of times that they should repeat his name?

S4: No, they all have their different methods or their different ways of working with him, so that each channeler would have his/her own way of invoking him, or a specific time or day of doing it.

CH: Do you know if he favors helping men, women, or children?

S4: There are a lot of stories behind him. I know that he favors women a whole lot-the fact that he was a womanizer. But at the same time, when he helps men, he never really asks anything in return, and I've had a lot of female clients that say that they have had

very weird and strange encounters in their dreams with San Simon-very sexual dreams with him, as though spiritually he was trying to be with them.

CH: Whereas with men he doesn't require anything of them?

S4: No, no interest, not at all.

CH: What about children, does he help heal children?

S4: He helps heal children, but he is not – his thing, his specialty is not really that.

CH: Mostly women. What sort of problems does he usually help with?

S4: It is always usually love issue, issues with love, with dominating, controlling, and having somebody come back to them.

CH: Ok. Do more women than men work with him?

S4: Most of the time it is usually more women.

MOJ: Does he help with immigration problems?

S4: Oh, yeah. They will petition anything and everything to him. When they are crossing the border they have to cross to get to this country, they usually do ask him for protection.

CH: Do you know any particular stories involving the assistance of San Simon?

S4: I've heard many but not specific details of time frames, and what specific events, but a lot of people do actually petition him for immigration stuff too.

MOJ: You've answered so many questions that were confusing us about San Simon. I want to thank you.

S4: He's so – if you would go there, again, there is a room of just… Some people even notarize their actual testimony of what actual happened, and they have documents posted on the walls of legal discharge papers, of what their condition was when they came in, what their condition was when they left, or blood work where it says you had a certain blood count and you were determined to have such an illness and you didn't have it anymore. They will always have proof on paper when you go to these shrines. The same is true for any Catholic saint in Mexico. They always have an area where people have their stories to tell. Even here, if you go to Olvera Street, they even have it there. I don't know if you've been to the Niño de Atocha Shrine? Outside, they have all these testaments and statements of people.

CH: You know, I kind of heard that Niño de Atocha and Ellegua, and San Simon are put together, are similar entities.

S4: Well there is an explanation. I mean, El Niño de Atocha would be a very high-level deity, and Ellegua would be kind of like in the middle, and San Simon would be at the bottom because he was actually a person that was born and lived. So you could say that maybe San Simon was a son of Ellegua, and the son of Niño de Atocha, being that he was alive and he was a human. Ellegua was never physically alive. He was just spiritually alive, and so was Niño de Atocha, so they are like at different spiritual levels just like Saint Lazaro and Babalu Aye in Santeria. In fact, Saint Lazaro is no longer a saint. He was actually demoted from sainthood. He is technically not a saint anymore.

CH: Really?

S4: Yes, there was this Pope back in the 70's that demoted Saint Barbara, Saint Alex, and Saint Lazarus because there was actually no physical proof, and there was something missing, so they demoted all these saints. In our beliefs, in Santeria, we believe that Saint Lazaro was actually a son of Babalu Aye because we believe that Babalu Aye existed a few thousand years before Saint Lazarus was born. We make that correlation of having him, like lets say people that have stigmata, it's not Jesus Christ. It is just the fact that his presence is just there physically with that individual. We believe that Saint Lazarus was actually the son of Babalu Aye, or Saint Barbara was actually the child of Changó because of her use of the red and white colors, and the fact that her father was killed by a lightning bolt. Those are the kind of relations that we assimilate.

CH: What does Niño de Atocha help people with?

S4: In Catholicism, with everything in general. There is no distinction.

CH: Is he utilized in Santeria?

S4: In Santeria, we assimilate him with Ellegua, which would be a road opener, or issues with children, children's issues – their health, their well-being, their birth.

CH: What kind of issues?

S4: With their protection, with their birth, meaning birthing a healthy child, and road opening: prosperity, good luck, and work.

CH: Can you give me an example of a ritual for road opening with Niño de Atocha?

S4: Niño de Atocha, that is more Spiritualism and Catholicism, so if it's traditional Catholicism, it's just a candle being lit and you praying for nine days. That is a traditional "**novenario**" for nine days and that candle being lit. It is simple and it is a traditional ceremony recipe. In Spiritualism, you would use candies. You would use like, four, individual paper bags filled with candies, with one cent coins, with just

different ingredients that are meant for prosperity that we use, like money and sweets. All of these are offerings to Niño de Atocha. You would just clean yourself with the four packets of all these candies and money, and a drop of honey, and just other stuff that you put in there, and you take them to the four roads and leave one in each corner of the road. That is where we believe Ellegua dwells.

CH: So then what would happen to those bags?

S4: We believe that once you place them, that you actually are giving them to El Niño de Atocha directly, because that is where he exists.

CH: So he exists at the crossroads, in the same way that Ellegua does?

S4: That is the Spiritualist belief. Other people would just make an altar for him and have candles lit, and flowers placed, and incense burning, in appeasing him and asking him for good luck and prosperity.

CH: He also helps children?

S4: Adults and children.

CH: What are some of the problems that he helps adults with?

S4: Usually money issues.

CH: Like getting work or having more money, abundance.

S4: Getting a job if you don't have one. Getting a better job if you have one, and if there is a promotion coming up, being favored and not someone else.

CH: So what are the similarities between the way Niño de Atocha is praised, and the way that San Simon is praised?

S4: San Simon, when you petition him, you don't give him anything such as candy. It is usually like Ellegua would be-tobacco smoke and hard liquor, and being on the floor and being in the corner, which is what we also do with Ellegua – behind a door or in a corner.

CH: El Niño de Atocha, where is he placed?

S4: Usually in a high place, being that he is a Catholic saint. He shouldn't be on the floor.

CH: He is more elevated?

S4: An elevated spirit.

CH: Is Niño de Atocha and San Simon ever called at the same time?

S4: When I've witnessed the ceremonies, no.

CH: No?

S4: No.

CH: Aside from the fact that San Simon could be seen as the child of Ellegua, or the child of Niño de Atocha, what are some of the other relationships that they might have?

S4: Their colors: black, red, and white which are also colors of Ellegua, and the fact that we believe that San Simon is a very jealous spirit. Usually, if you are going to call upon him, you do not call upon everybody else because he will be very jealous, and will feel that you are not putting all your attention on him. Ellegua is usually that way, where he has to have everything done to him first before anybody else, and be looked upon as unique and special. With el Niño de Atocha, it is a whole different thing. There are no issues with him about being first or last.

MOJ: We have two minutes left.

CH: Do you have any questions?

MOJ: No, I just want to thank Ramon again, you're incredible. Should have talked to him about this, three weeks ago.

S4: The day you guys were going to come here, I was telling her I had to leave for my – I was telling her, that she would also be a very good person to interview since she was the founder of botánicas in California, back in the sixties or fifties.

MOJ: We talked about that before, we just never had a chance to see her.

S4: Yes, me neither. I hadn't seen her for eleven years, since that day that you guys came, and that's because she had fallen in her house, and she was in the hospital.

END OF TAPE